



## *United States Embassy in Mali*

# Press Release

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### **40 American Peace Corps Volunteers Take Oath**

Forty Americans were sworn in on January 6 at a swearing-in ceremony held at the U.S. Ambassador's Residence in Bamako. This ceremony begins their two-year assignments as Peace Corps Volunteers working in various sectors.

U.S. Ambassador to Mali, Mary Beth Leonard, swore in the volunteers at her residence in Bamako. The ceremony was attended by representatives of the Malian government, as well as by the U.S. Peace Corps-Mali Country Director, Michael Simsik, other Peace Corps Volunteers, and organizational partners.

The U.S. Peace Corps has a long and proud history, this year marking the 50th anniversary of the agency's inception. Peace Corps' legacy of service continues to promote peace and friendship around the world with 9,095 volunteers currently serving in 76 host countries. Since its inauguration in 1961, over 200,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps Volunteers, promoting better understanding between Americans and the people of the 139 countries that have hosted them.

Today, Peace Corps Volunteers are working in emerging and essential areas such as education, health (including malaria and HIV/AIDS prevention), business development, environment, youth development, and agriculture.

This year also marks an important milestone in Mali, as the Peace Corps is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> year of service in the country. Peace Corps/Mali was first established in 1971 when the first group of American volunteers arrived to work as agricultural extension agents and to assist the Malian government in addressing issues related to drought and food shortages. Since then, the partnership between Peace Corps and Mali has continued to be vibrant and strong. More than 3,500 Americans have served as Peace Corps volunteers in over 1,000 Malian communities.

At the request of the Malian government, Peace Corps volunteers in Mali currently work primarily in six sectors: education, environment, food security, health, small enterprise development, and water sanitation. These sectors are considered the key to helping Mali meet its national development goals.

Since their arrival in October 2011, the Peace Corps/Mali volunteers who took their oaths today have lived with local host families while participating in an intensive 10-week training that included instruction in a local language, either Bambara or Malinké, depending on the area of the country where the volunteers will live during their service. The volunteers also learned about Malian cultural traditions, and during their training were welcomed with warmth and hospitality. They have come to know the kindness and generosity of their host families.

As part of their hands-on technical training, the volunteers learned about the various aspects of food security and how it is linked to agriculture, business, and nutrition. They also learned, with their Malian counterparts, how to conduct an in-depth community analysis for the purpose of identifying resources and needs, and for implementing grassroots development initiatives.

The work of the volunteers who took their oath on January 6 will focus on issues related to food security and community-based development initiatives throughout the country. The volunteers will specifically work on the production, marketing and consumption aspects of food security, and will also work in the environment, small business, and health sectors. After their swearing-in, the volunteers will be departing for their sites across 4 of the 8 regions in Mali to begin working in the communities where they have been selected to serve for the next two years.